

# *Louis Comfort Tiffany & Nature*

"Mother Nature is the best designer."

"Nature is always beautiful."

– Louis Comfort Tiffany



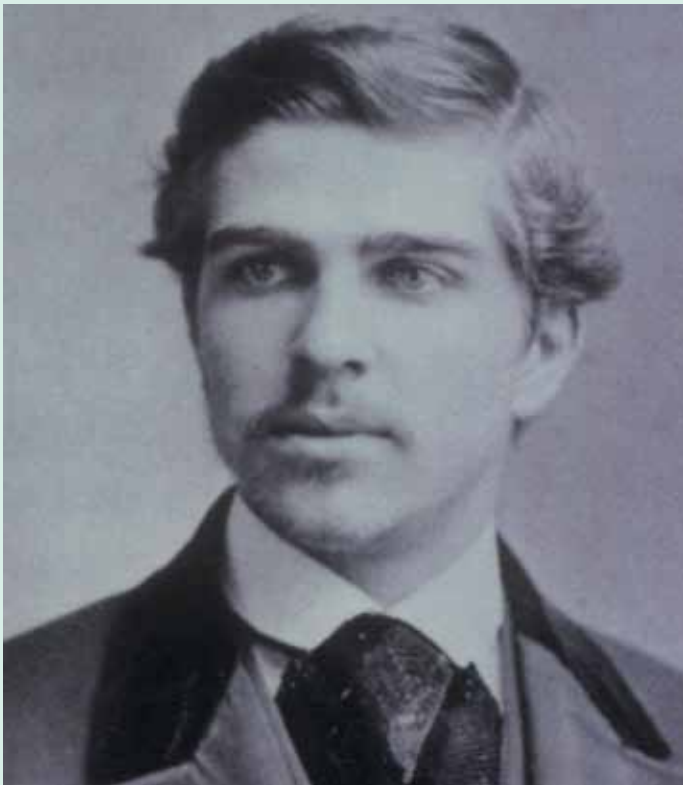
by Peter Alexander Gottesman





Louis Comfort Tiffany in the Garden, by Joaquín Sorolla y Bastida, oil on canvas, 1911

Nature's vivid colors, wondrous forms and sensuous surfaces inspired Louis Comfort Tiffany throughout his life, leading him, as Paris gallery owner Siegfried Bing observed, to present 'nature in her most seductive aspects.'



*Louis Comfort Tiffany, 1878 photo, private collection*

Being exposed to the finer things in life and to artistic luxury objects from an early age clearly had an effect on Louis Comfort Tiffany (1848-1933). However, Louis Tiffany did not follow his famous father Charles into the family silver and jewelry business, which his father had worked so tirelessly to establish in New York City. Instead, the passionate and artistic Louis sought make his own mark; Louis wanted to become a painter, and in 1865 he persuaded his father to send him overseas on a grand trip to Europe, to absorb the works of the great masters such as Titian and Da Vinci.

While in France, the young Tiffany fell in love with the magnificent stained glass windows of Chartres Cathedral and Notre Dame — a love he would one day translate to a uniquely American style of stained glass. Tiffany also was enthralled by Europe's idyllic countryside, such as in Italy, where he would spend hours sketching scenes of the natural world. Without doubt, explains Tiffany scholar Alice Cooney Frelinghuysen of The Metropolitan Museum of Art, "Nature was really his passion — it comes out even in the earliest sketches he did on the first trip that he took to Europe; tiny 3 x 4 inch sketches of one aspect of a flower, or a little landscape scene; and this became his credo essentially, throughout the rest of his career; some people call it 'the religion of beauty.' He almost practiced 'the religion of nature.' "

By 1800, although Louis's father Charles had become the most famous jeweler in America, Louis was still determined to make a name for himself in the world of art. "He originally had hoped to be a great painter, and he was a very good painter, but he realized he was not going to be another Monet. And he wanted to make his mark in history and do something that was very unique and distinguished," recounts Harry Platt, the great grandson of Louis Comfort Tiffany.

And so it was, after shifting his focus from painting, and after some very successful years as an interior designer, that Louis began experimenting with the medium he had been smitten by since visiting the French cathedrals of Chartres, Notre Dame and Sainte-Chapelle — stained glass. When Louis opened his own glass factory in 1886, his timing could not have been better; during the 1880s the U.S. experienced a religious revival, and as hun-





*Birches, watercolor on cardboard, ca. 1922,  
signed lower right Louis C. Tiffany*



dred of churches were erected across the country, parishioners wanted stained glass windows to match the beauty of those in Europe's cathedrals. Like his father, Louis was a master of self promotion, and soon his was the largest stained glass studio in America. As Alice Cooper Frelinghuysen of the Metropolitan Museum of Art describes, "He managed to have articles and press releases sent out to every local newspaper whenever a Tiffany stained glass window was unveiled [in a church]. His name was just very much quickly propelled to the forefront of the public."

Tiffany's church windows became so popular, that wealthy Americans wanted his stained glass designs in their own homes. These new commissions allowed Louis Comfort Tiffany to incorporate the theme he loved most: nature. His secular windows showcased landscapes, flowing waterfalls, animals and exotic birds. Tiffany also found other domestic uses for his glass which highlighted nature's beauty, including decorative hand blown vases and the brilliantly-fashioned lamps which are now synonymous with his name.

Not only was his innovative glass stunning to behold, but his use of light was unrivaled. As Tiffany's great grandson Harry Platt explains, "What he achieved that was unique in history with these windows, as well as the lampshades, was his use of light. No artist was ever to achieve that luminosity on canvas that he achieved through stained glass, which was using light as a major component in the whole design."

Tiffany drew widely and deeply upon nature, and it was central to his quest for beauty. His interest in nature was far reaching — he drew upon fish, sea creatures, and insects for decorative motifs, and on a vast array of plant life, flowers, and animals for objects themselves. He was an avid gardener, bringing exotic plant species to his magnificent estate, Laurelton Hall, in Long Island. The common blooms of local woodlands and fields, however, were Tiffany's favorites, such as ferns and Queen Anne's Lace (*See photo below & vase, right*). The elaborate gardens of Tiffany's Long Island home were a living testimony to his passion for the natural world.



*Queen Anne's Lace photographed by Louis C. Tiffany*

Tiffany's lifelong preoccupation with gardens inspired him to create some of the most naturalistic depictions of flowers and plants in the history of stained glass and glassware. His success with these subjects was enhanced by the heightened awareness of landscape during the second half of the nineteenth century, when publications on gar-

dens and plants, and especially flowers, proliferated. Tiffany amassed a huge library on all aspects of horticulture, and was an avid collector (and photographer himself) of photographs of flowers and plants.

Winged creatures drew Tiffany's attention as well, for their awe-inspiring forms, and especially for their iridescence. Indeed, Tiffany biographer Charles de Kay describes the *Favrile* glass Tiffany pioneered as "distinguished by certain remarkable shapes and brilliant or deeply toned colors, usually iridescent like the wings of certain American butterflies, the necks of pigeons and peacocks, and the wing-covers of various beetles."

In addition to sketching and painting watercolors directly from nature since his youth, Louis was unquestionably influenced by Edward C. Moore, the guiding genius of silver design at Tiffany & Co., his father's firm. Moore was one of the earliest American *Japonists*, absorbing the Japanese fascination with the most ordinary elements of nature as well as a meticulous attention to detail.



Seaweed, c. 1900-10, watercolor on paper



Seaweed-Motif Brooch, c. 1906, gold, pearls, enamel



Queen Anne's Lace pottery vase, 8 inches high





Morning Glories sketch, 1913, watercolor on paper

## FAVRILE GLASS: STAINED GLASS WINDOWS

Of all of Tiffany's artistic endeavors, stained glass brought him by far the greatest recognition. From 1877 through the 1920's, his firm produced thousands of stained glass windows for buildings in North America, and in Great Britain, France and Australia.

Starting in the late 1870s Tiffany and his American stained glass rival John La Farge revolutionized the art of stained glass. Before their innovations, the craft had been essentially unchanged since medieval times, when the details of stained glass were painted on flat glass panes with glass paints, and then fired, before being held together with lead solder.

But Louis Tiffany created a stunningly fresh visual realism in stained glass, by cutting out the actual shapes of detailed objects from glass (i.e. an individual leaf, a flower petal, a grape, a bird's feather or beak), and then inserting these tiny glass pieces one by one into the larger stained glass creation, rather than merely painting such details on top of a flat glass pane, as had been done for centuries. Not only were Tiffany's colored windows composed of realistically-cut pieces which followed the natural outlines of objects, but these individual pieces were often rounded, and protruded from the pane — instead of lying flat and lifeless.

### ECCLESIASTICAL NATURE WINDOWS

Deviating completely from accepted themes for church windows, Tiffany eliminated the biblical figures from many of his compositions, conferring religious significance instead on the landscape and the natural world itself. His memorial windows in churches and mausoleums often featured forests, streams meandering through mountain valleys, or floral motifs.

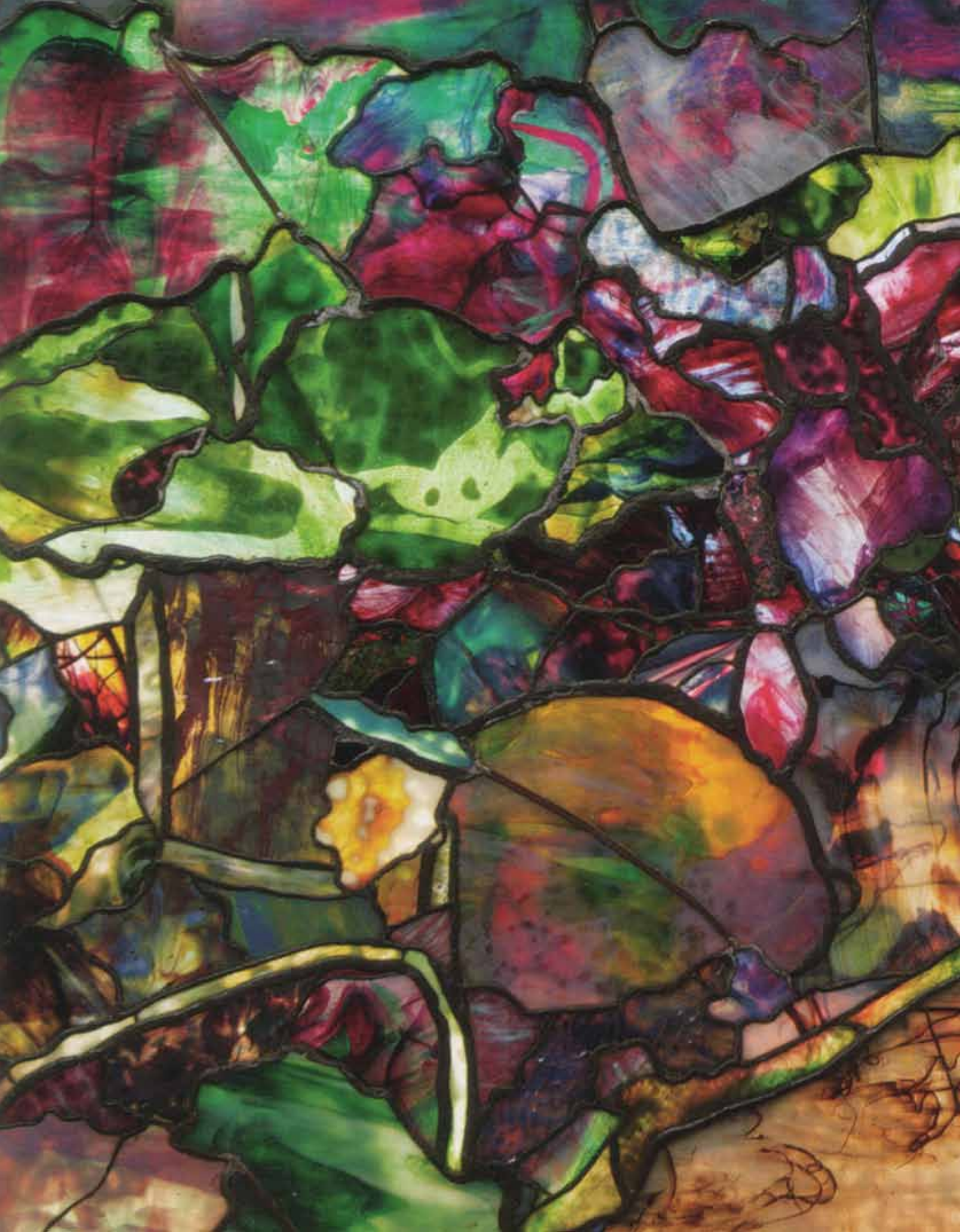
Irises were among the flowers Tiffany preferred for memorial windows. Often used as a symbol of the Virgin Mary, the plant is frequently grown near water, enabling Tiffany to combine the flower with another of his favorite themes that also had religious significance.

Tiffany's largest church landscape window — featuring waterfalls and rambling streams, was installed in the Central Baptist Church in Providence, RI. It aroused fierce controversy among the congregation due to its lack of religious figures.

*Design for figural window, Louis C. Tiffany ca. 1910-1920, watercolor over graphite*





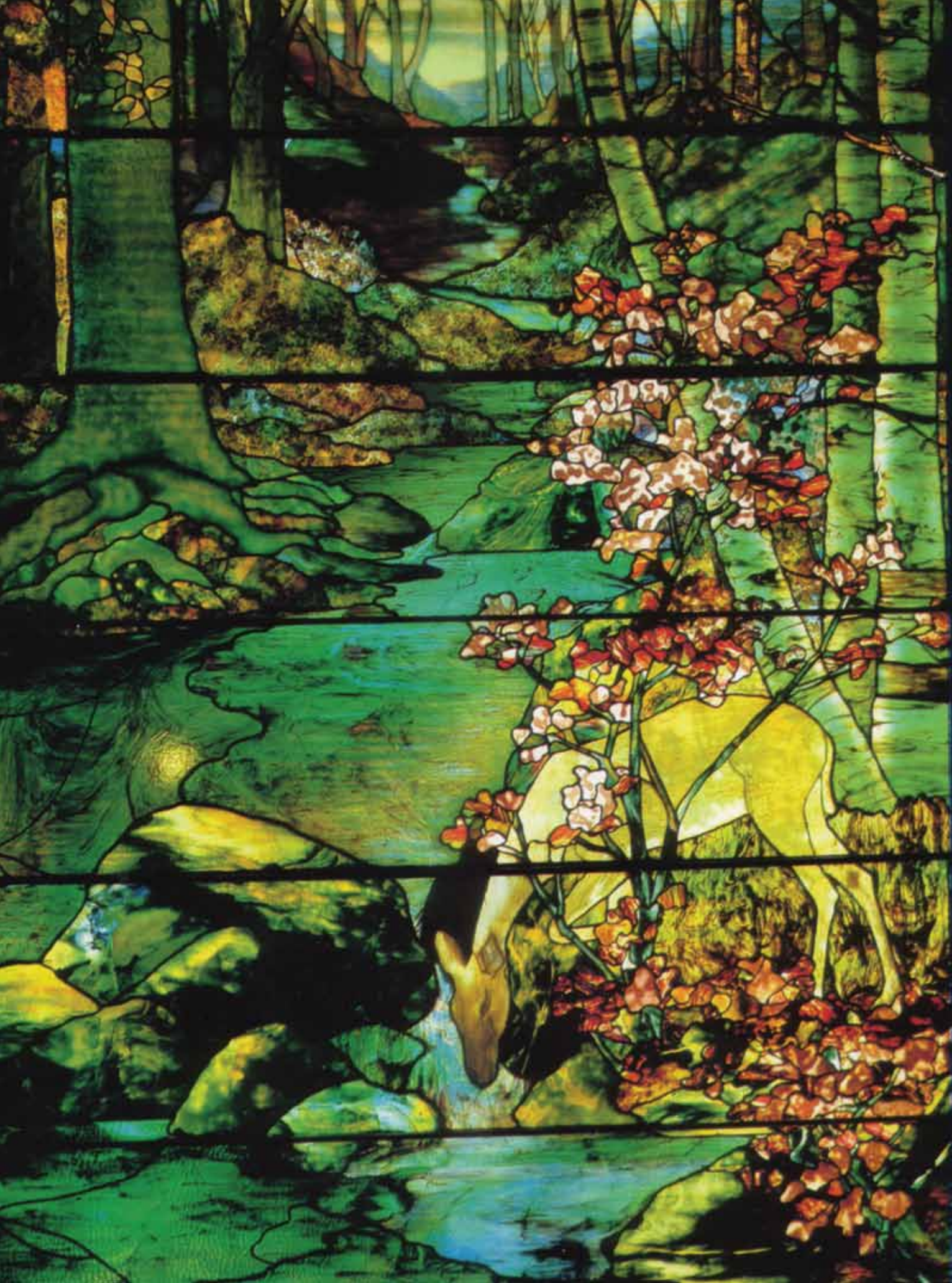






Pumpkin and Beets window,  
leaded favrile glass, ca. 1899-1900



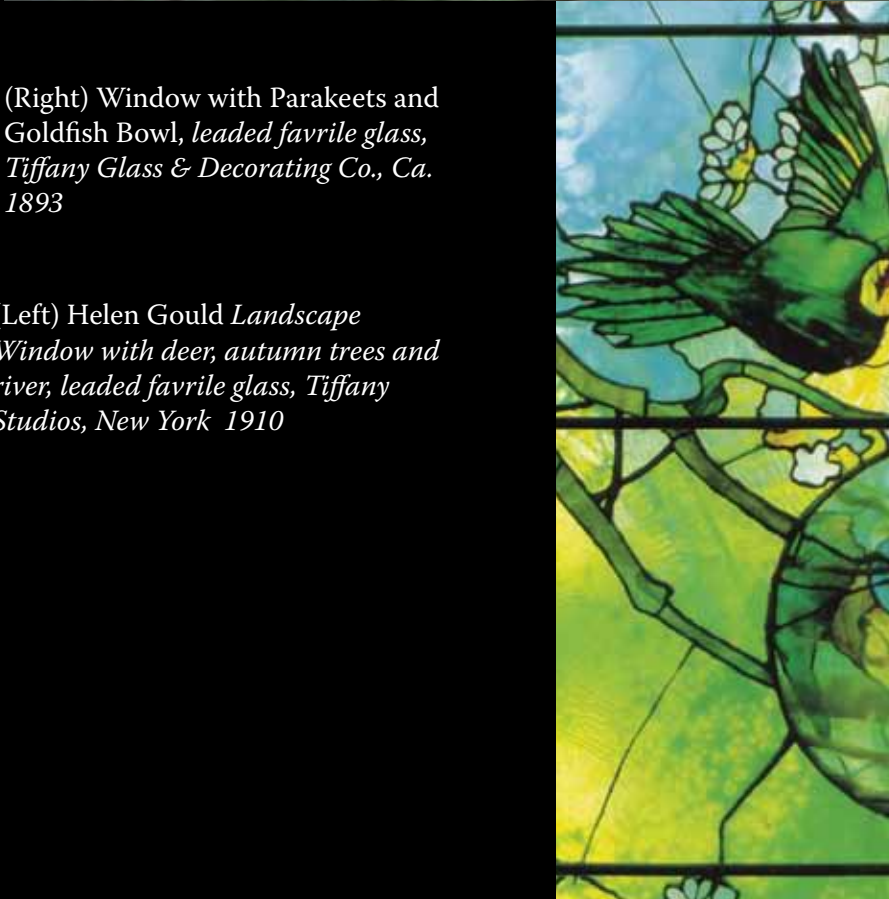






(Top) Window panel with swimming fish, leaded glass, Ca. 1890

The motif of carp seen through rippling water was borrowed from Japan - where ornamental koi were a beloved fish in garden ponds. Here, green and blue striations in the glass itself mimic the currents of the water. Tiffany enjoyed the interplay of glass and water.



(Right) Window with Parakeets and Goldfish Bowl, leaded favrile glass, Tiffany Glass & Decorating Co., Ca. 1893

(Left) Helen Gould Landscape Window with deer, autumn trees and river, leaded favrile glass, Tiffany Studios, New York 1910





## FAVRILE GLASS OBJECTS

Tiffany combined his keen eye as a colorist and naturalist with new glass-making technologies to produce blown glass objects with surfaces, textures and hues that had never been seen. He created stunning new color effects in glass, and gave his glass creations the illusion of three-dimensionality and movement.

Tiffany also infused heated metallic oxide fumes into the glass itself, to achieve spectacular iridescence — a dazzling innovation. He gave his glass the name “Fabrile,” derived from the Old English *fabrile*, meaning “handwrought,” to signify that each piece was hand-blown and unique. The name was changed by 1894 to the more sonorous “Favrile.”

Tiffany translated his love for plants, flowers, birds and animals into many kinds of glass vessels.



*(Top) Plum-shaped bowl decorated with plums, enamel on copper, 1899. Bold three-dimensional sculpting was used to create naturalistic, plump deep purple plums and translucent green foliage that envelop the large round bowl. This bowl remained in Tiffany's personal collection and later passed to The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York*



*(Right) Peacock Vase, favrile glass, ca. 1900, collection of The Metropolitan Museum of Art. The shimmering, iridescent plumage of peacocks inspired this extraordinary favrile glass vase. Tiffany adored peacocks and kept them at his Long Island estate, Laurelton Hall. He often had the birds brought down from the barn to strut around the grounds. In fact, one of the most elaborate parties Tiffany threw at Laurelton was his Peacock Feast of May 1914. A vase with peacock-feather design was known to have graced the living hall of his estate.*





*Favrile glass vase in form of tree truck, 1895-1910*



*Silver-colored favrile glass vase in form of tree truck, 1895-1910*





*(L to R) Two photos of the same vase. Among Tiffany's favorite pieces was this unusually large dark vase with sensuous, abstract floral decoration, ca. 1903. It is one of the few objects he chose to illustrate in color in the luxurious biography of his life's work which he commissioned in 1914. Tiffany himself described it as having a "black body of soft texture with blue iridescent decorations suggesting iris."*





*Like many favrile glass objects, the vase changes color as light strikes it. In normal, reflected light it appears black with azure decoration – yet when light shines directly through it, the body metamorphoses into dark green, and the decorations become yellow and green.*



## FAVRILE GLASS LAMPS

The fascination with light which led Tiffany to make breathtaking innovations in stained glass also made him one of the first to incorporate electric lighting into his artistic designs. Tiffany began experimenting artistically with electric lighting in 1885, and in 1899 he introduced table lamps with bulbs shielded by colorful leaded-glass shades.

The lampshades were essentially stained glass windows wrapped around a light source. Intricate arrangements of semi-translucent glass pieces, Tiffany's lampshades were the perfect complements for harsh, early electric bulbs — lighting his colorful glass, shielding the eyes from the bright light and directing it downward. They provided soft illumination inside a wonderfully artistic object.

Despite their popular appeal, Tiffany was ambivalent about his lamps: they were left out of the lavish Tiffany biography by Charles de Kay commissioned by Tiffany, which included every other medium in which he worked.

Undoubtedly, Tiffany's desire to create unique decorative objects for the home conflicted philosophically with the manufacture of these lampshades in multiples. Yet the very existence of lampshade patterns and models in his factory, and the increasing volume of orders, led to uniformity.

And so, although the craftsmanship and artistry of his stained glass lampshades was exquisite, this conflict between the reproduced object and the ideal of a unique work of art was difficult for Tiffany to reconcile in his role as a creative artist. Like his father, the mass market held no interest for Louis Comfort Tiffany. Indeed, all of Louis's creations — including his lamps — could only be afforded by the very well-to-do.

In 1913 Tiffany rationalized his earlier decision to abandon painting for the decorative arts, saying:

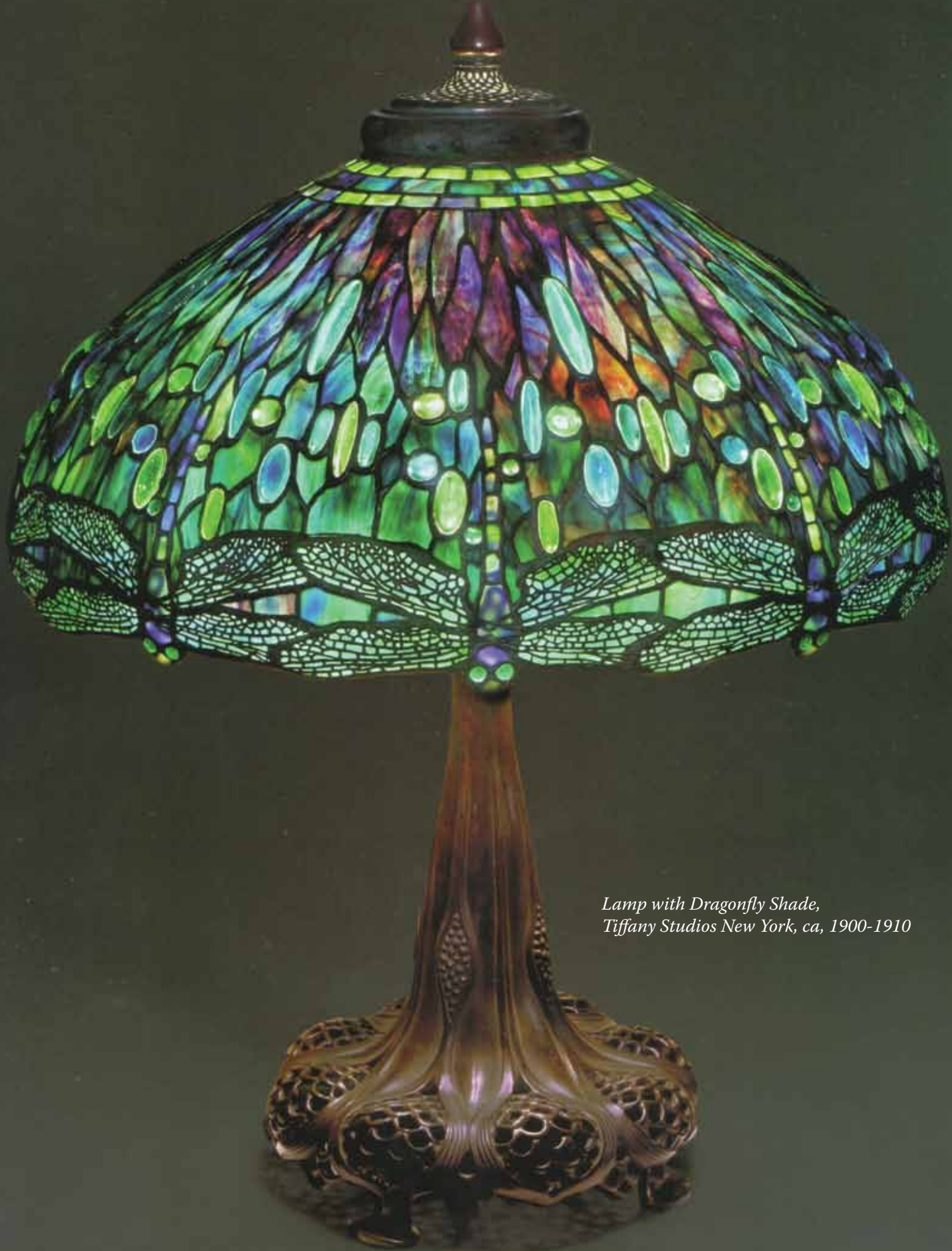
"Yet the fact that things of daily use like lamps, flower-vases, and toilet articles reach a wider public than do paintings and sculpture make the 'decorative arts' more important to a nation than the 'fine arts.' "



*Photograph of dragonfly, collection Louis C. Tiffany.*

*The dragonfly was a common motif in Japanese art, representing late summer and early autumn — and also marital success.*





*Lamp with Dragonfly Shade,  
Tiffany Studios New York, ca, 1900-1910*



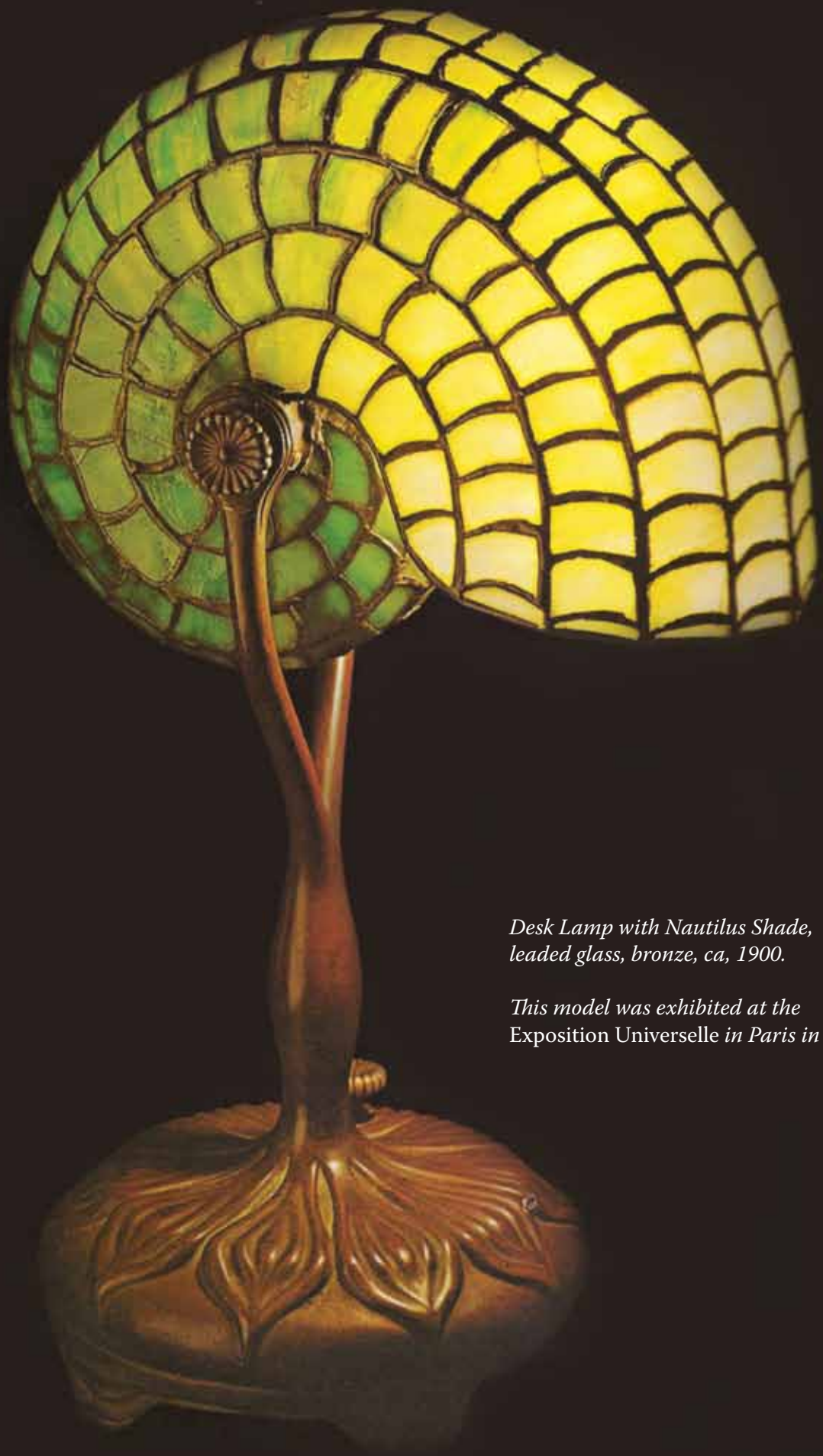


*Virginia Creeper table lamp, favrile glass and bronze, ca. 1900-1905, probably a unique commission.*

*The open network of tangled branches at the top, and the compact pattern of stalk and berried foliage on the base's column replicate the natural growth of the Virginia Creeper, and integrate this magnificent lamp's design.*

*Due to the blended autumnal coloration and the shape of its leaves, this lamp was for many years erroneously called the Maple Lamp.*





*Desk Lamp with Nautilus Shade,  
leaded glass, bronze, ca, 1900.*

*This model was exhibited at the  
Exposition Universelle in Paris in 1900.*



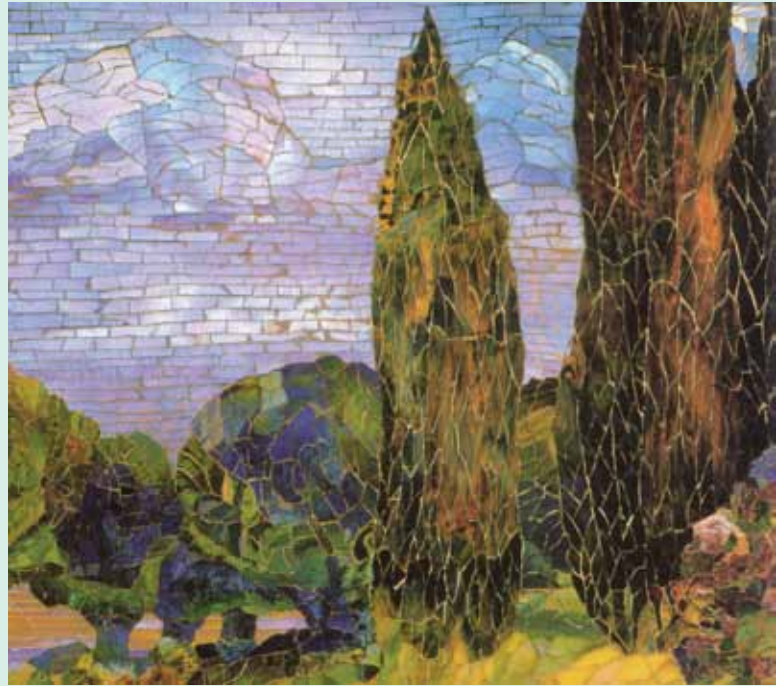
## MOSAICS

By freeing glass mosaics from their traditional square-cut pieces and primary colors, Tiffany was able to create extraordinary, luminous illusions in mosaic which were previously impossible.

Cypress trees (*top right*), detail of a masterful Tiffany mosaic fountain in the American Wing of the Metropolitan Museum of Art. The tall, slender cypresses, fashioned from Tiffany's distinctive mottled greens and yellows, are pieced together from custom-cut, asymmetrical glass fragments which form the outlines of the trees. Long horizontal slivers accentuate the sky, while vertical pieces form the cypress trees.

Both intense and subtle, Tiffany's rich color effects (reminiscent of the antique mosaics he admired in Ravenna, Italy) were achieved by juxtaposing tiny shapes of slightly varying hues. This permitted subtle nuances, and produced a more faithful rendering of nature.

(Right) *Parrot panel, irridescent glass mosaic, 1910*





## STONE MIMICRY

Tiffany's love of the natural extended to the geological world - both vast landscapes (*below left*) and minute mineral striations (*below right*). Even molten volcanic rock and multicolored stones dug from the Earth were aspects of nature Tiffany paid tribute to in glass.

### AGATE WARE

Tiffany's agate vessels imitated the undulating layers of color found in true agate. Agate glass was first produced by the Romans of Alexandria, and later mastered by the Venetians of the late fifteenth century. In Tiffany's version, brown, cream and yellow hues were commingled. After the vessel had cooled and hardened, it was cut in facets to enhance its stone like appearance.

*Yellowstone Canyon, watercolor and gouache on tinted paper, Louis C. Tiffany, 1917*



*Agate Vase, favrile glass, Tiffany Furnaces, 1910*





## LAVA GLASS

A visit to Mount Etna in Sicily during an eruption is said to have inspired Tiffany to capture in glass the force and beauty of the molten volcanic flows and rock formations he observed there in 1870. Tiffany's lava glass was irregularly shaped to give the effect of a molten flow. Though the technique was one of Tiffany's most innovative, the great pressures of expanding metal oxides during heating led many lava vases to break in production. Hence, prohibitively priced for most Americans, lava glass became the preserve of Tiffany's most affluent private clients and museums.





(Opposite page) **Lava Vase, favrile glass, ca. 1918.** *The blackened surface of this vessel is coated with particularly thick iridescent gold. Its irregular form embodies the molten rush of lava — which Tiffany recreated with molten glass. Molten streams of gold ooze over the crater-like rim of this squat, misshapen vase. Tiffany showed his love of the irregular and accidental in nature by marking this favorite vase an “Exhibition Piece.” Automobile tycoon Walter Chrysler particularly admired Tiffany’s lava glass, and acquired this vase for his personal collection.*

(Below) **Lava Bowl, favrile glass, 1908.** *This bowl is perhaps the most extraordinary of Tiffany’s lava vessels. Its broad areas of golden-luster glass, both smooth and flecked, vividly recall melting rock spilling down the sides of a volcano. It’s organic shape and surface texture appears to have been dictated by the molten glass. Such optical effects, achieved by ingenious techniques that used texture, color, and layering to react to different lighting conditions, give favrile glass its magnificence and vitality.*



## CAMEO GLASS

The cameo technique involved attaching colored glass shapes to the outside of a glass vase, then engraving these shapes with fine detail.

Lily pads and Queen Anne's lace, two of Tiffany's favorites, are featured in the nearly colorless incised vase shown on the opposite page. These natural forms were created by carving through one or more layers of glass.

This breathtaking vase (opposite page) is gracefully subtle — its colorless body deepening to a pale, pearly blue opalescent at the top. The lily pads are carved from a light spring green glass applied to the lower part of the vase, with stems of the same color seeming to float to the top of the vessel. The delicate cut blossoms of Queen Anne's lace have been executed in an extraordinarily skillful manner with each minute floret fully articulated, and the blossoms, in different states of maturity, rendered from many different angles.

The fluidity of the design conceals the laboriousness of its execution; such work was painstaking and time consuming which may account for the small number of Tiffany cameo-cut vases in existence today. Striving to forge new forms of American art, Tiffany may also have been reluctant to work in a medium so closely identified by the public with English and Continental European glasshouses, such as those of Stourbridge, Bohemia and Alsace-Lorraine.



(Above) Intricately-layered orange, white & green cameo vase, inscribed L.C.T.

(Right) Louis Comfort Tiffany, Tiffany Glass and Decorating Company. Probably carved by Tiffany's Austrian-born engraver Fredolin Krieschmann (1853-1898). Vase, 1895-98. Engraved Favrite glass. Krieschmann's obituary noted "he often worked four months on a single piece."





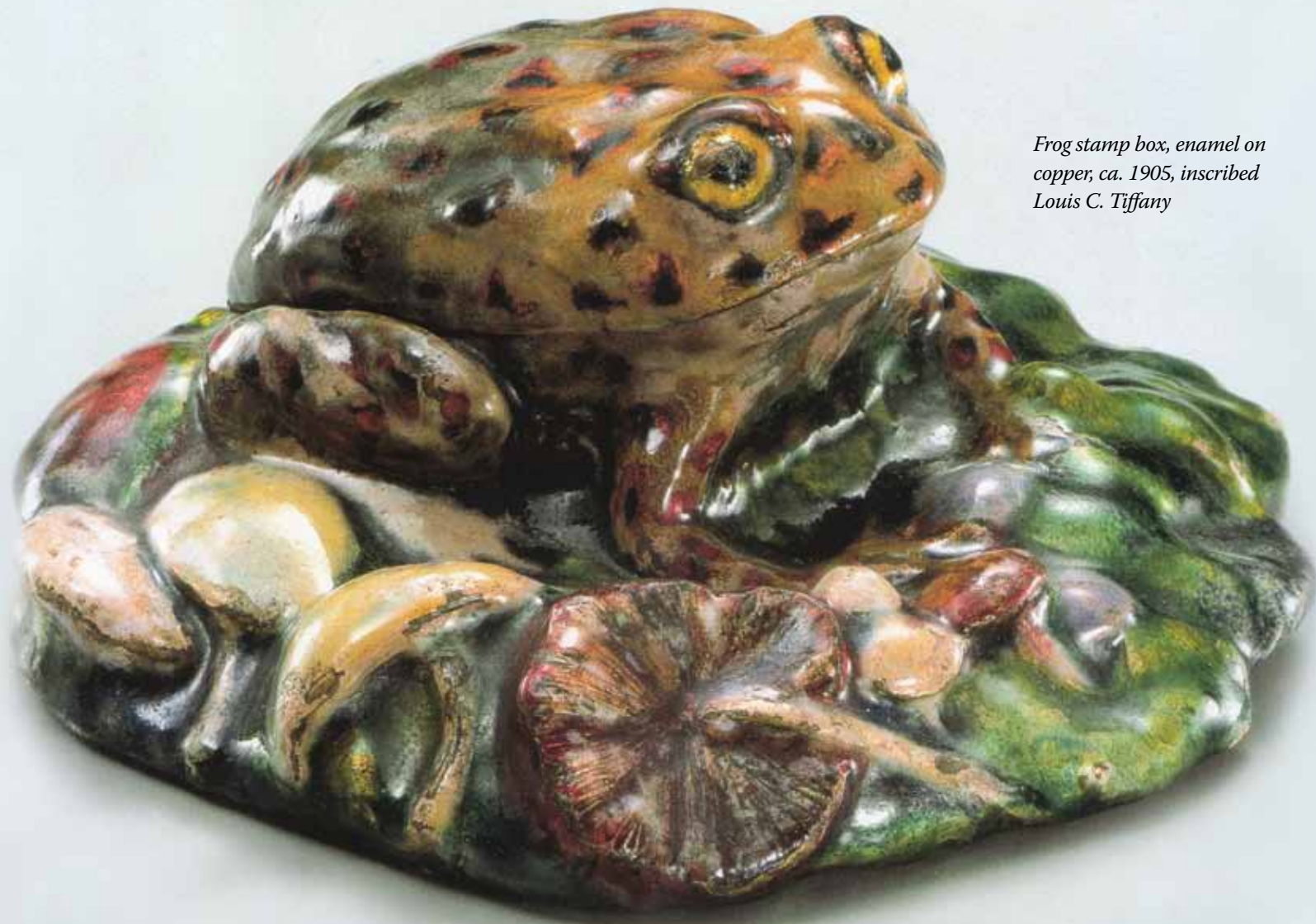
## ENAMELS

Tiffany's work in enamel was a logical extension of his work in glass: enamel is glass and glass silicate which is colored with metallic oxides, then applied to copper or other metals and fired at high temperatures.

The Tiffany Glass and Decoration Co. factory in Corona, Long Island began making enamel objects in 1898. Louis Comfort Tiffany's enamels are deliberately based on native American plants and insects, often humble varieties. Meticulous watercolor studies of these nature-themed enamel objects exist.



*Inkstand with Mushroom Cluster, enamel on copper, ca. 1902*



*Frog stamp box, enamel on copper, ca. 1905, inscribed Louis C. Tiffany*





*Butterfly box, enamel on copper, dated July 28, 1902, inscribed Louis C. Tiffany.*

*Box with Salamanders, enamel on copper; Ca. 1900.*



*Cicada box, enamel on copper, ca. 1899-1904, made for Tiffany's personal collection.*





*Enameled Gourd Tray, enamel on copper, Tiffany Studios, New York, ca. 1900. The finest piece of enamel in Tiffany's private collection, this large gourd-shaped tray with protruding decorations of gourds and leaves was unmistakably inspired by Japanese art.*





*Enamel on copper jar decorated with Indian Pipes,  
a wildflower whose semi-translucent white stems and  
flowers form one beautiful, connected stalky entity. A  
masterpiece of Art Nouveau design, exhibited at the  
1900 Paris Exposition Universelle.*



## JEWELRY

After his father's death in 1902, Louis Comfort Tiffany became the artistic director of his father's firm, Tiffany and Company. Louis's familiarity with jewelry manufacturing at the firm, as well as his collaboration with his father on several pieces for the Paris Exposition Universelle in 1900, had already inspired him to produce jewelry at his own workshops on Twenty-third Street. Louis's earliest pieces, including the grape cluster necklace and the dragonfly and dandelion hair ornament shown here, were made when Tiffany began experimenting, in much secrecy, with jewelry design.

However, unlike the formal jewelry made by Tiffany & Company, Louis's pieces were often asymmetrical, with fluid lines and organic shapes, expressive of his desire to replicate natural forms. Louis's jewelry motifs show his fondness for insects and plants, especially uncultivated varieties such as Queens Anne's Lace, blackberries, dandelions, and wild grape. Many of Louis's pieces feature dragonflies, and on one curious pendant he paired a peacock with a pink flamingo.

Design and craftsmanship were far more important to Louis than opulence. As a result, Louis broke new ground by using semiprecious stones – opals, moonstones, garnets, amethysts and coral – in contrast to the precious gems which had typically been favored by Tiffany and Company. The semiprecious stones embodied qualities that Louis valued in other media. For example, the milky quality of moonstones resembled the opalescence of his glass, and the fiery glow of opals, the rainbow iridescence of Favrite vases. Tiffany set these stones in inventive ways – mimicking natural forms, often in combination with enamel. The brilliant translucence of the enamels complemented the luminescence of the stones for a colorful effect similar to that of his light-filled stained glass windows. Tiffany was also one of the earliest jewelers to use platinum, a metal new to the industry at the turn of the century.

*Medusa Pendant — loosely representing a jellyfish. Described in Tiffany's authorized biography as "A marine motif, half crab, half octopus... with...writhing feet." Its tentacles are studded with demantoid garnets, & the bejeweled creature is inlaid with opals, sapphires and rubies on 14kt. Gold, ca. 1904. Hand-colored photograph*





One of the earliest examples of Louis Comfort Tiffany's jewelry is this necklace composed of a series of grape-clusters and leaves. Tiny circular black opals represent the fruit, and enameling in shades of green on gold forms the delicate shimmering leaves. The finely executed enamel and gold reveal the hand wrought character of the jeweler's craft. Tiffany chose the necklace as one of the twenty-seven pieces to be made for the Louisiana Purchase Exposition of 1904, and it is the only of those exhibited known to survive. (The necklace came to the Metropolitan Museum of Art from Sarah Hanley, Louis's nurse and later companion, to whom he must have presented it.)



*Grape Vine Necklace, opals, gold and enamel, ca. 1904*



*Dragonfly Hair ornament,  
platinum, enamel, black opals,  
pink opals and demantoid  
garnets, ca. 1904*



One of the most extraordinary pieces of Louis's jewelry to survive is this hair ornament – a remarkably realistic rendering of two dragonflies resting on a pair of dandelion puffs, or seed balls.

Dating to roughly the same year as the grape-cluster necklace, it shows the plants not at the height of bloom, but in a natural fading state, just before the seeds are blown away. Remarkably, one of the puffs is portrayed as already partially stripped of its seeds.

The striking interpretation was achieved by the use of delicately worked platinum for the silken strands of the puffs, with green and yellow enamel on the small leaves just below them. The strands are surrounded by an almost imperceptible network of platinum that forms a sphere, to which minute dots of white enamel were applied.

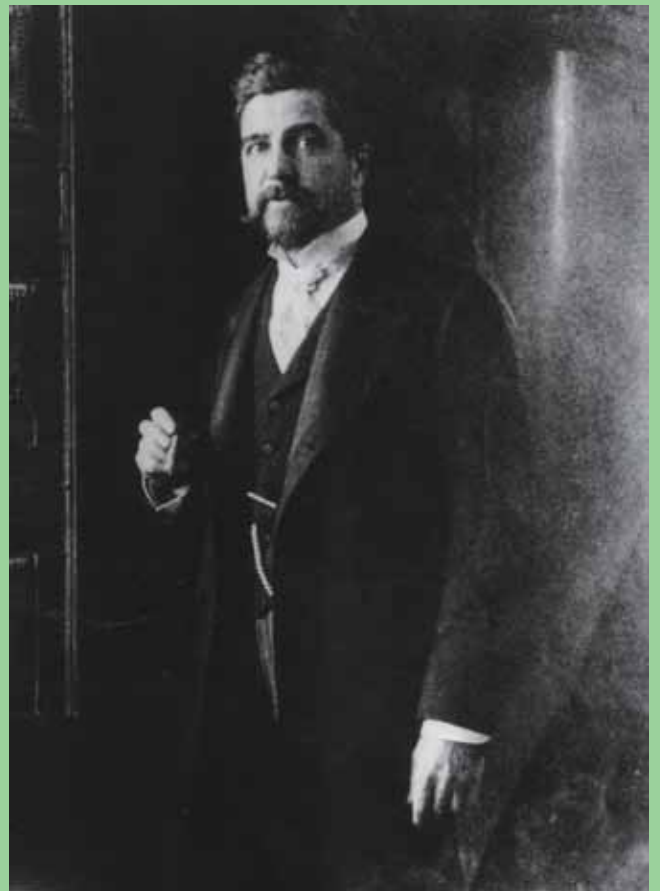
The dragonflies' backs consist of a row of graduated black opals in a rich fiery blue, while the heads and eyes are pink opals and green demantoid garnets. An almost unbelievable creation in metal filigree, the gossamer-like wings were said to be a special alloy of iridium and platinum. All of these elements have been combined in a masterfully intricate design – in a true feat of jeweler's genius.

## Tiffany Studios: The Bottom Line

By the 1890s, although Louis Tiffany was selling hundreds of thousands of dollars of glass objects each year, his factory was losing money. Yet this never seemed to bother Louis – for he was more artist than businessman. He never paid much attention to the bottom line, and was more concerned with how an object looked than how it sold.

“He always looked for the best materials. He didn't skimp, and in so doing he unquestionably incurred tremendous costs. And word has it that his father, or he, would then personally bail out any difficulty that his studio had run that year.”

– Alice Clooney Frelinghuysen, Curator,  
Metropolitan Museum of Art.



## LUXURY OBJECTS

This exquisite box shows Tiffany's infatuation with ancient Egypt, particularly its emphasis on the incredible forms — and mystery — of the living world. The discovery of King Tutankhamen's treasure-laden tomb in 1922 by Howard Carter sparked an intense interest in ancient Egypt in Europe and America.



*This exquisite scarab humidor shows Tiffany's infatuation with ancient Egypt, particularly its emphasis on the incredible forms — and mystery — of the living world. A circular metal hatch representing the sun lies between two inlaid favrile glass scarabs, whose legs and wings are carved in wood, ca. 1908.*

*Scarabs or Dung Beetles, were closely associated with the sun by ancient Egyptians, who saw a similar miracle of rebirth in the round sun's daily setting and rising, and the baby dung beetle's miraculous birth from eggs laid in lifeless, perfectly-spherical balls of cow dung which adult beetles roll across the desert. The discovery of King Tutankhamen's treasure-laden tomb in 1922 by Englishman Howard Carter sparked an intense curiosity in ancient Egypt in Europe and America.*





18-karat gold "Four Seasons" jewel box which Tiffany & Co. exhibited at the 1915 San Francisco Exposition. The cloisonné enamel panels represent: spring — a flowering cherry branch and tulips; summer — a chestnut branch and poppies; autumn — grapes and peaches; winter — snow-covered pine branches and fire. White opals, tourmalines, blue and pink sapphires, and chrysoprases surround the enamel panels.

## TIFFANY THE MAN

Louis Comfort Tiffany was a flamboyant man – he loved dressing up in costumes and he loved a good party. These habits were undoubtedly aided by his being born into the vast riches of his father, Charles, the pre-eminent merchant of his day. However, Louis tried to keep the flamboyant side his personality in check, so as not to offend his more conservative father, who lived modestly despite being exceedingly wealthy – and was known to turn down coveted invitations to society balls.

Louis, in contrast, overlooked no expense in throwing an elaborate ancient Egyptian themed costume ball at Tiffany Studios at 345 Madison Avenue in 1913. He mailed invitations, complete with hieroglyphics, to a who's who list of New York society. The precise theme was ancient Egypt at the time of Cleopatra – and Louis himself presided over every detail of the festivities, dressed as an Egyptian prince. Mr. and Mrs. John D. Rockefeller Jr. came, she dressed as Minerva, he as a Persian.

The ball was set specifically in Alexandria, Egypt, on the very day Cleopatra VII was awaiting the return of Marc Antony from “distant lands.” Tiffany hired Egyptologist and artist Joseph London Smith of Boston to ensure the authenticity of the every detail – and Tiffany made certain his guests' costumes were as perfect as his own:

**“Everybody had to come dressed for the time of Cleopatra, whether they came dressed as Greeks or Romans, and they all had to go out and get a costume, and the costume had to be approved by a committee that Louis Comfort ran. In other words, you just couldn't go out and throw something together and expect to be allowed in. You had to get your costume approved before you could even come to the party.”**

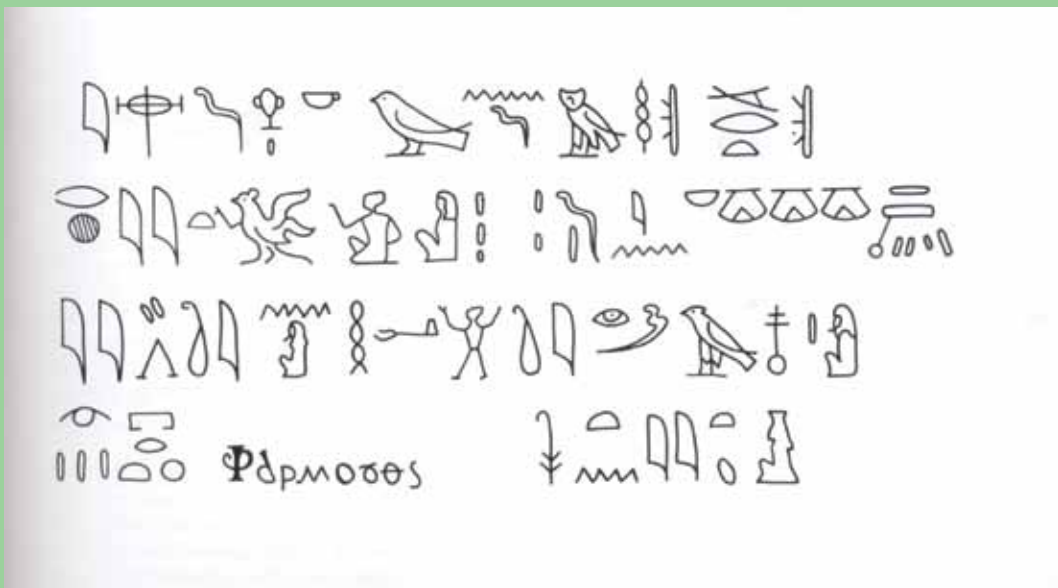
**– Harry Platt, Great grandson of Louis Comfort Tiffany.**

Louis was a perfectionist as well as an artistic pioneer. He was a dedicated artist and a serious worker – whether creating a new texture of glass, detailing a sketch, or designing his Long Island estate's architecture and gardens. He demanded a great deal of himself, and of his children. His suits were impeccably tailored and his hair and beard always neatly trimmed. During the summer he wore only white linen suits, which he changed several times a day if they became smudged or soiled. “He cared about how he looked and about how the things around him looked. He wanted his surroundings to be beautiful.” – Alice Cooney Frelinghuysen, Curator, Metropolitan Museum of Art.





*Louis Comfort Tiffany (left) in Egyptian regalia, and his daughter (right) dressed as Cleopatra at the ancient Egyptian fête, 1913.*



*Hieroglyphics on the invitation to Tiffany's Egyptian fête*

## CONCLUSION

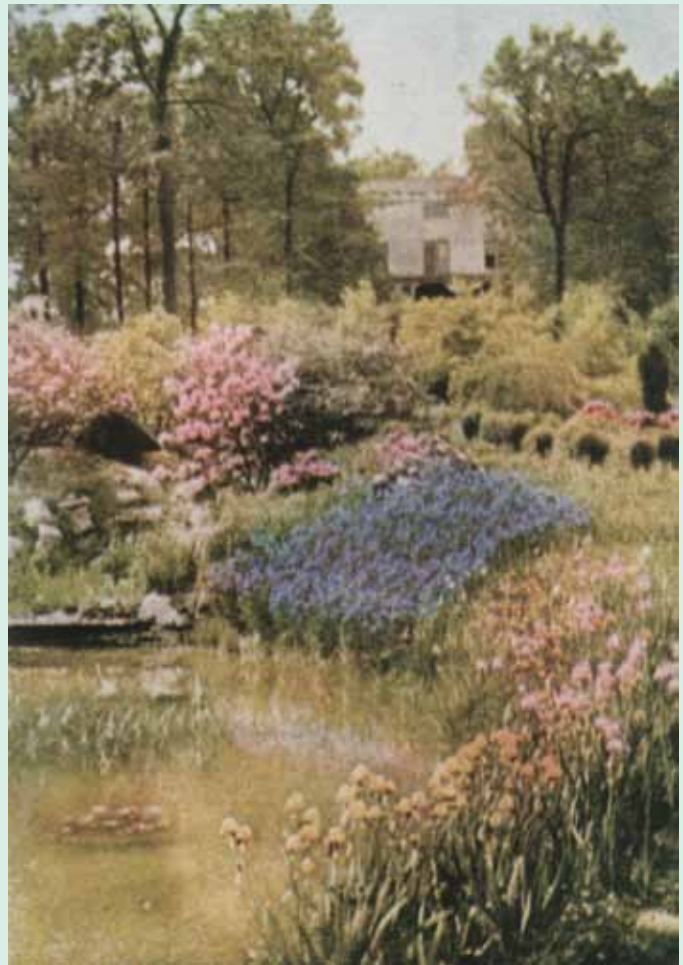
### LAURELTON HALL & TIFFANY'S FINAL WISH

When his father Charles died in 1902, Louis spent most of the \$4 million he inherited on a new home in Oyster Bay, Long Island which he named Laurelton Hall. This would become Tiffany's Eden — into which he infused all his creative energies in his final years.

The estate was 580 pristine acres, and Tiffany's love of nature was evident everywhere – from the flowering gardens, water lily pools, and flowing fountains, to the breathtaking vistas of Long Island Sound.



*Lily pool behind Laurelton Hall. From Henry H. Saylor, "The Country Home of Mr. Louis C. Tiffany," Country Life in America 15 (December 1908)*



*Gardens with house in distance, Laurelton Hall. From Henry H. Saylor, "The Country Home of Mr. Louis C. Tiffany," Country Life in America 15 (December 1908)*



At the center of Laurelton Hall stood four large marble columns, the tops of which Louis painstakingly carved into naturalistic replicas of flowers. These columns now stand in the American Wing of New York's Metropolitan Museum of Art.



*Poppy capital, Loggia from Laurelton Hall, ca. 1905, by Louis Comfort Tiffany. Limestone, ceramic, and favrile glass. The Metropolitan Museum of Art.*



*Saucer magnolia capital, Loggia from Laurelton Hall, ca. 1905, by Louis Comfort Tiffany. Limestone, ceramic, and favrile glass. The Metropolitan Museum of Art.*

On May 15, 1914 Tiffany organized another fete, this time inviting one hundred and fifty prominent New Yorkers to “inspect the Spring flowers at Laurelton Hall.” He planned to surround them with flowers: guests were chauffeured to the mansion along a drive lined with blooming laurel. Tiffany’s thirty-five gardeners had seen to it that the grounds were aglow with blooming phlox, tulips and pansies. Wisteria dripped from the terraces and surrounding trees. Laurelton’s fruit trees were in full bloom. Yellow orchids (Tiffany’s favorite color) circled the main fountain of the courtyard, while voluptuous flowers and branches of apple blossoms filled the house.

Louis Comfort Tiffany’s final dream was to create an art school, where the most talented young American artists, regardless of means, could flourish in a beautiful natural setting; the one he had worked tirelessly to create: Laurelton Hall. “It is my dearest wish to help young artists of our Country to appreciate more the study of Nature, and to assist them in establishing themselves in the art world,” Louis declared in 1930, just three years before his death.

And so, Tiffany established an endowment for promising students of many different artistic fields to live and study under strict supervision at Laurelton Hall, to perfect their craft amid its beautiful surroundings. Perhaps Tiffany could cultivate generations of artists in America long after his passing — each artist, like himself — a creative force who drew his strongest inspiration from nature. ∞



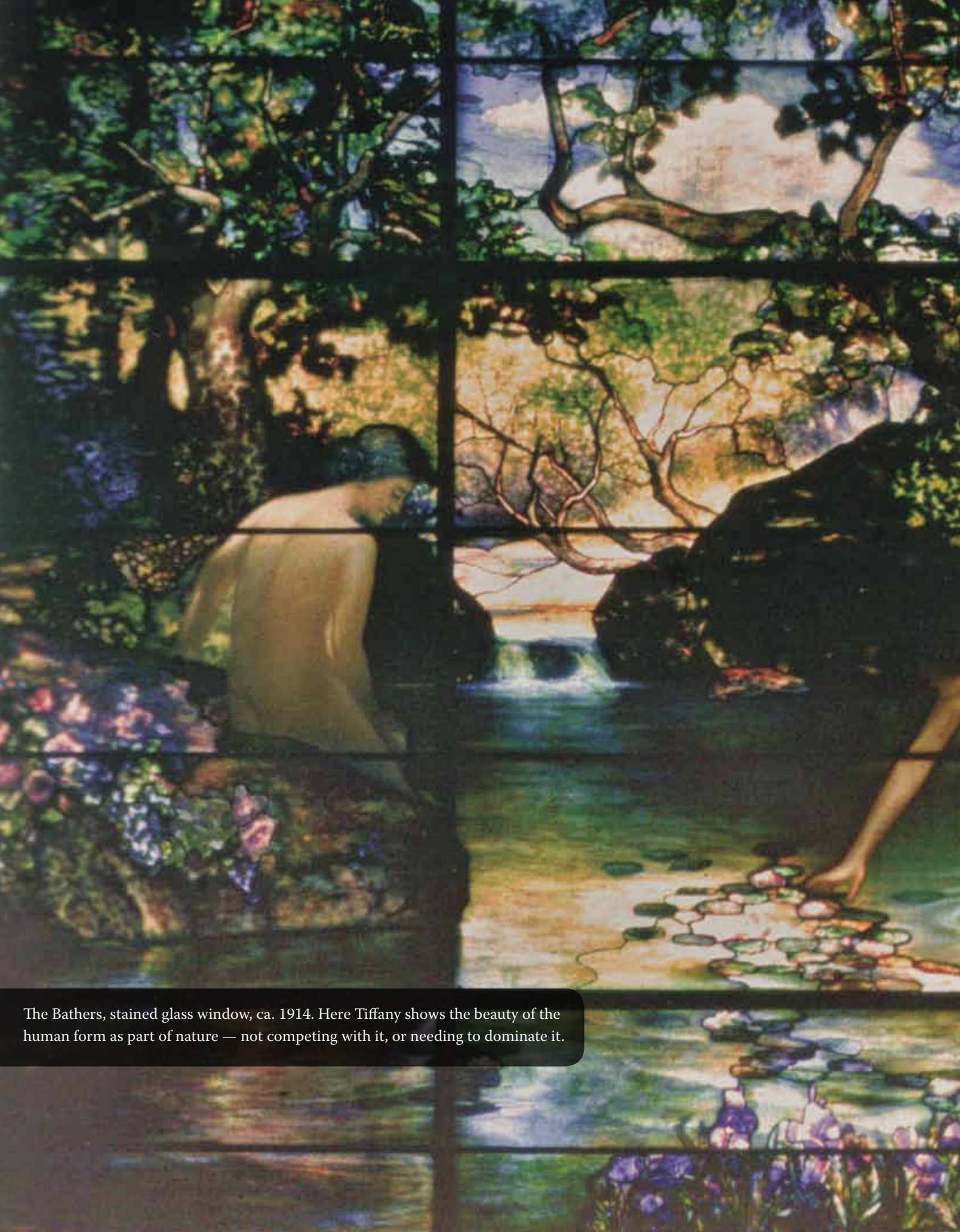
*Favrile glass “Paperweight” vase decorated with jonquils, made ca. 1900 for Louis Comfort Tiffany’s personal collection, and later passed to Metropolitan Museum of Art.*





*Detail of vase (left).*





The Bathers, stained glass window, ca. 1914. Here Tiffany shows the beauty of the human form as part of nature — not competing with it, or needing to dominate it.



